

Testimony Prepared for Presentation to Appropriations Committee Public Hearing 12/9/09

Good Afternoon, my name is Noraleen Dunphy and I represent The Child Guidance Center of Greater Bridgeport. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you about the programs of the Children's Trust Fund and how eliminating these essential services would essentially amount to fiscal suicide!

In collaboration with both Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, Child Guidance Center is host agency to two Trust Fund Programs, a large Nurturing Families Network Program and a smaller Family Empowerment Program. By identifying "high-risk" families and by supporting, educating and empowering them, these programs help parents create a stable household for themselves and their children, ultimately keeping them out of the very costly "system" of DCF and/or foster care.

Our program in Bridgeport has the distinction of being one of the first in Connecticut. Since January 1996, we have worked intensively with 528 families in our Home Visiting Program alone, and with over 1,000 additional families in Nurturing Connections and the Nurturing Parenting Group. A lot has changed in the past fourteen years, but what has not changed are the struggles and difficulties the families of Bridgeport face; if anything the effect of our current recession has compounded those problems.

Children living in poor households are 25% more likely to be abused and 44% more likely to be neglected than other children. Children living in poverty are also at greater risk for developmental, behavioral and health issues and more likely to become involved with not only the Department of Children and Families (DCF), but other agencies such as: the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHAS), the Juvenile Justice System and the Corrections System, just to name but a few.

Let me tell you a little about our program in Bridgeport:

- The demographic/risk profile of participants show a population at significant risk for child abuse and in need of support. Of the 27 families who have entered the program in 2009, 100% were single, 30% had unstable housing, 63% had not finished high school, and 44% were under the age of 18.
- Further, 15% had a history of substance abuse, 33% had late, none, or poor prenatal care, 26% had a history of, or current depression, and 11% had a history of psychiatric care
- None of the 39 Bridgeport families we assessed in 2008 for reports for abuse and neglect in the DCF system had a substantiated report.
- Outcome data on our 2 standardized instruments, the CAPI-R (Child Abuse Potential Inventory Rigidity Scale) and the CLS (Community Life Skills Scale) has consistently shown statistically significant improvement.

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- The reduction on the Capi-R indicates that parents have significantly less rigid parenting beliefs after participating in the Bridgeport NFN program for one year.
- The CLS data indicate that parents have significantly more knowledge of how to access resources in their community, specifically around areas of transportation, social networks, and budgeting.

There is no doubt that the consequences of child maltreatment are costly. According to Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA), the cost of intervening to help and of treating the medical and emotional effects of abuse and neglect cost our society over \$9.4 billion annually. However, preventing the abuse and neglect from happening in the first place will not only keep children safe and avert the consequences, but will save money.

A study by the Colorado Children's Trust Fund estimated that funding home visiting services to eligible families would cost \$32 million annually, compare that figure to their annual budget of \$402 million for CPS and the savings are staggering.

In other words, for every \$1.00 spent, \$12.00 is saved!!!

As a state, we must ensure that all children receive the nurturing and support they need to achieve their full potential. These children have to be able to grow up, finish High School, and be allowed to become productive, contributing citizens of our state.

Child abuse and neglect have damaging effects on the physical, psychosocial, educational and behavioral development of children. Research shows a clear correlation between child abuse and increased risk of dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and adult crime. The evidence clearly demonstrates that evidence-based child abuse prevention programs, such as the Nurturing Families, truly save money both in the short-term and the long-term.

I know that you all recognize the need and value of not only NFN, but other very worth-while social services programs, but the reality is that cuts have to be made. I can only implore you, our elected officials, to make the cuts to services that will have the least damage. Please don't let our budget be balanced at the expense of our families and children. I thank you for your time and attention.

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